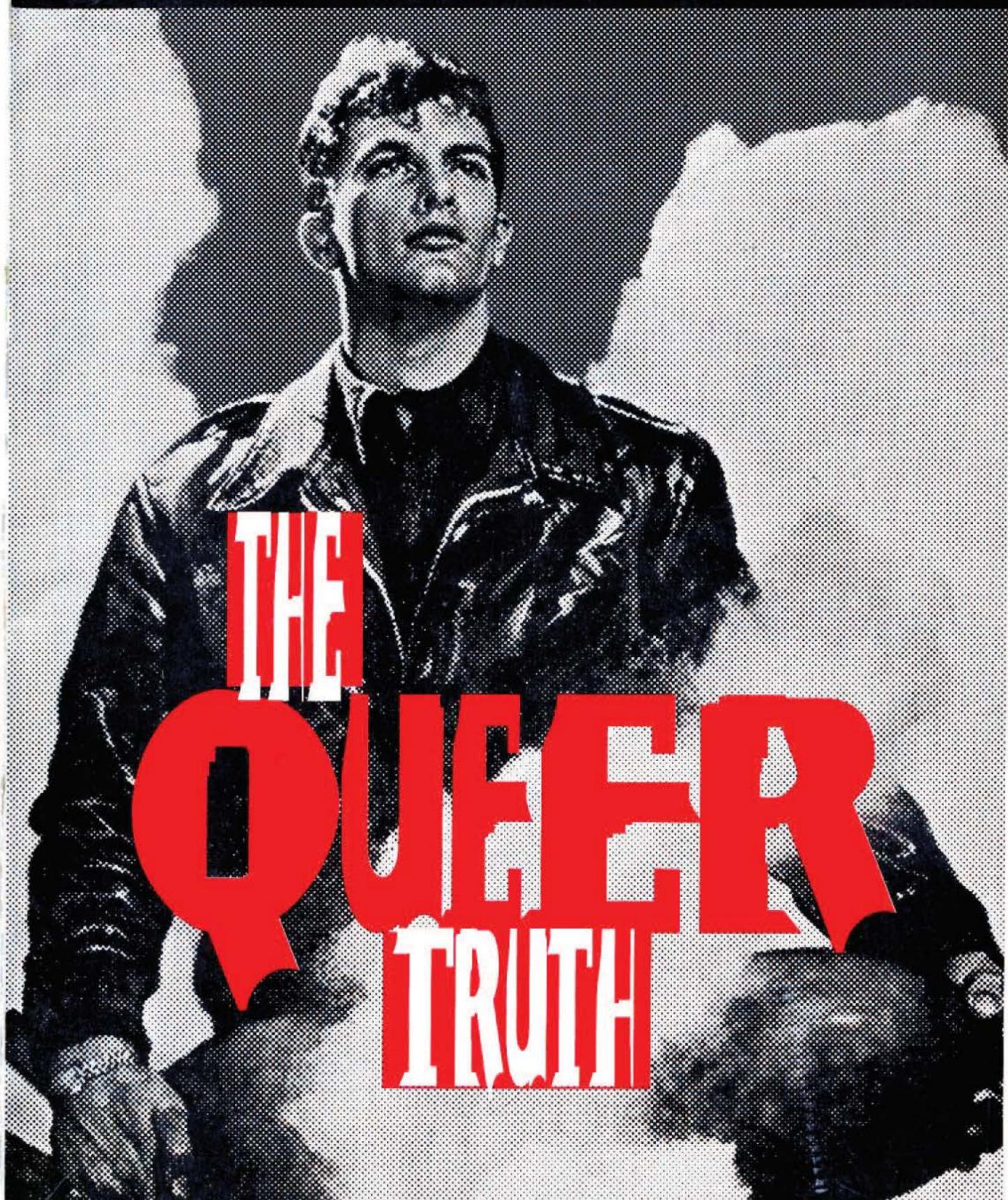


HOMOS IN THE MILITARY



THE
QUEER
TRUTH



THE MARCH ON WASHINGTON: APRIL 25, 1993

QUEERS REFUSE TO SURRENDER

Over a million Americans descend on Washington today to demand equality, calling on the government and the public to consider a wide range of issues.

Some concerns, like the need for increased funding and stronger leadership in the battle against AIDS, illustrate the life-or-death stakes of the struggle. Other concerns, like protection from employment discrimination, illuminate the economic stakes of the struggle. But no issue so clearly demonstrates the root causes of inequality as does the issue of military service of openly gay, lesbian, or bisexual Americans.

No issue so clearly defines the battle lines in homosexual America's struggle for civil rights. The military's ban has become the line in the sand.

This issue has polarized America. Successfully integrating the military would establish a federal precedent for the tolerance and acceptance of homosexuals that would trickle down to every community in the nation. Failing to do so could jeopardize political gains made by homosexuals since the Stonewall Riots.



A SAILOR DROPS A BAR OF SOAP
...and it becomes the eye of the storm. An embarrassed nation watches it spin, ashamed to glance above sudsy knees and witness the naked truth of our sexual diversity, afraid to face our humanity.

While the radical right charges that homosexuals are using the military to further a political agenda, activists argue that the change is necessary to build a stronger military, a sexually healthier military, a more honest military.

Some of those arguments are presented here in the words of a former sailor, separated for homosexuality on April 29, 1987.

After two years of superior service,

his off-duty behavior far from base became the subject of investigation. Threatened with prosecution, he admitted his homosexuality and was discharged from the U.S. Navy under protest.

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Portrait of a sailor discharged for homosexuality.

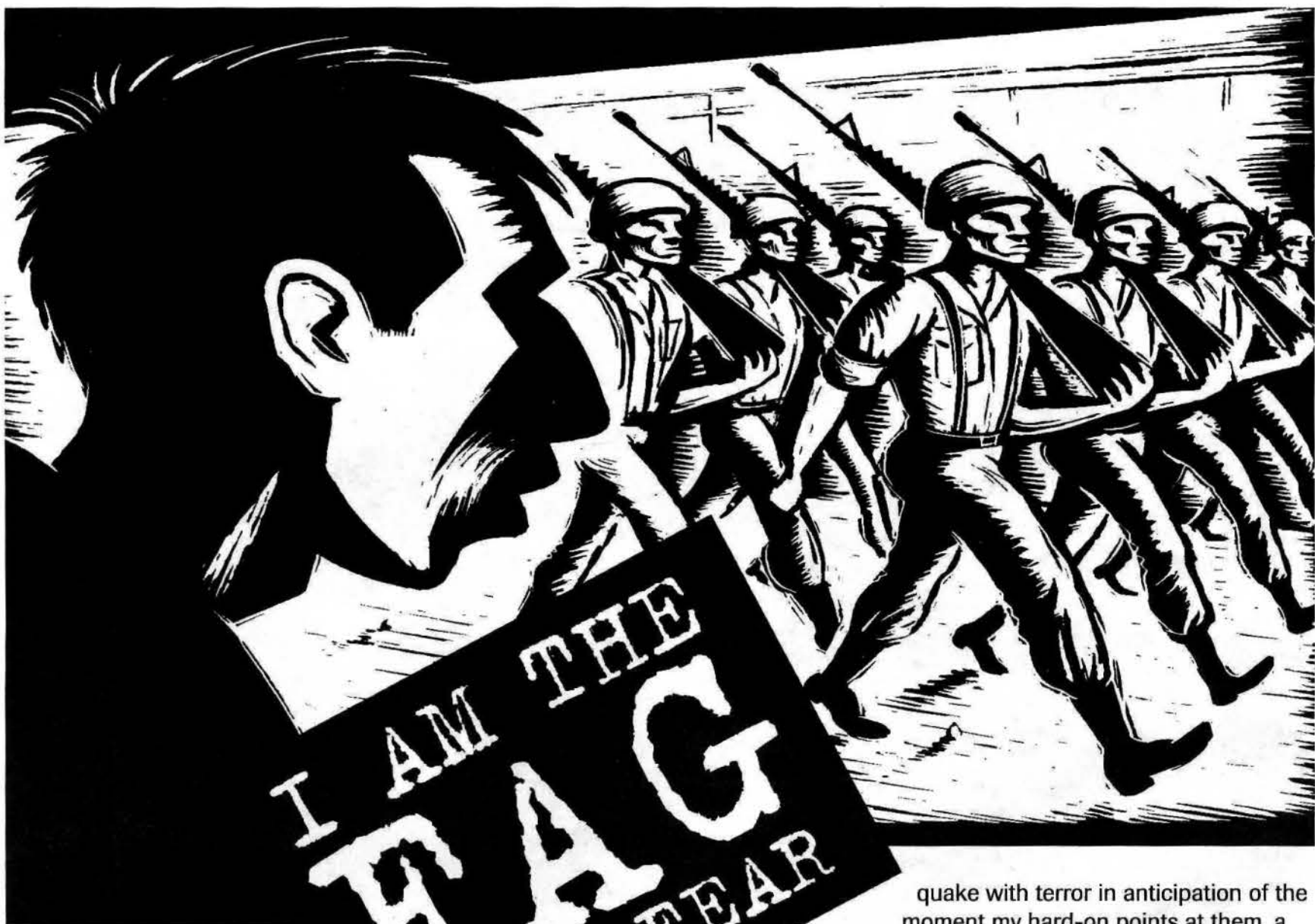
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Behind the closed doors of the innermost Pentagon offices, the big brass shudders when they imagine me in boot camp showers, late at night with another lonely recruit.

In the Senate hearing chamber, righteous voices catch in righteous throats when they speak of me leading a unit, in command of twenty horny sailors.

On living room couches across America, concerned parents wring worried hands as a talk show host raises the specter of me in camouflage, ready to corrupt their teen-aged sons.

At port town bars all over the world, fists clench around cold beer bottles as model sailors curse me and my patriotism. "Fucking fag! Not in my Navy."

Yes. I'm that fag they fear. The fag who threatened national security by my promiscuity and vulnerability to blackmail. The fag who threatened morale, good order, and discipline — undermining unit cohesion by simply telling the truth. The fag with a hard-on in the shower and a furtive glance in the chow line. The fag who's not afraid of who he is. The fag who's not afraid of them.

Yes. I'm that fag they fear. But why? Why are these rough, tough Marines, brave soldiers and sturdy sailors afraid of me? Why are these iron-clad generals and powerful senators and wise men-of-god afraid of me?

They fear me because I tell the QUEER TRUTH.

They fear me because I'm living proof that their entire socio-sexual world is based on lies, the heterosexual lies of straight boy privilege. The same lies which nurture high school sex gangs like the Spurs, then hypocritically denounce them. The same lies which create the rapist, then blame the raped. The same lies which encourage irresponsible breeding, then deny a pregnant woman her most basic bodily choices. The same lies which silenced a nation in the face of a devastating plague.

The straight boys like their world. They wrote the rules, after all. The lies are theirs. And as long as we never talked about sex, the rules were never challenged, the lies never exposed. The straight boy's place as the active sexual agent was never questioned. His position as the predator was safe, protected by unfair laws, economic apartheid, and a false religion. A complex system of lies created a world in which procreation was the chief moral good and the male controlled the breeding. A world in which women were property and sissies were scorned. A world in which wives stayed in the kitchen and fags like me stayed in the closet.

But those rules are killing me. Those Lies are destroying my people. And my queer soul is too big for the closet they designed for me.

Yes. I'm that fag they fear. They

quake with terror in anticipation of the moment my hard-on points at them, a cosmic revenge for generations of uncontrolled straight boy erections. They hide their eyes, horrified that my furtive glance will fall on them and they will have to face their own desires. They buttress their lies with laws and morality so they can condemn rather than confront me.

Yes. I'm that fag they fear. And they know I've been there all along. I was there in the high school locker room when they had the hard-on they couldn't explain. I was there in a Boy Scout pup tent when they played show and tell. And more frightening still, I was there in that boot camp shower, late at night with another lonely recruit. I was there as a unit leader, in command of twenty horny sailors. I was there in camouflage, corrupting their teen-aged sons. And I was standing next to them in a port town bar when they cursed me and my patriotism.

Now everything has changed, just because I'm not afraid to clench my fist and say, "It's my Navy, too!"

**THERE IS NO
GREATER COWARD
THAN HE WHO
RETREATS FROM
THE TRUTH.
NO MORE CERTAIN
VICTOR THAN HE
WHO ARMS HIMSELF
WITH IT.**

LOVE UNDER FIRE

It's not a new idea at all



**Since men first waged wars to loot their neighbors
or defend their breeding grounds, since men first
eschewed a peaceful life by the hearth to
take up arms alongside their friends and neighbors,
they have shared a special love.**

How could it be otherwise?

We are human paradox, struggling for community even as we recognize that we are ultimately alone. Individual beings who come out of the womb alone and enter the tomb alone.

Consider this: you will suffer the two most traumatic experiences of human existence alone. No one else suffers precisely as you suffer in those key moments of your life. No one else feels exactly the same feelings or thinks exactly the same thoughts. That intractable solitude is the basis of our individuality — and that we recognize it, contemplate it, try to compensate for

it makes us human and separates us from the other life on this planet.

Out of the womb alone. Into the tomb alone. And everything in between is a desperate struggle to connect, to communicate, to touch another's hand and share a piece of our common road.

Twins fascinate us because they have bent the rules with an almost shared birth. Same womb. Same seed. Same troubled trip into a hostile world. Their bond is beyond our understanding, a bond which separation cannot break, a bond which life outside the womb cannot sever. We are fascinated

as with clones, how close they are. Born together, perhaps they need not struggle for that moment of connection which we all crave—and try our entire lives to achieve. Or at least the touch-starved among us so imagine.

At the end of the road there are rule-benders too. And even as they cross the bar—often tragically—we somehow envy their special bond. Engraved upon our collective imagination is the image of men left behind on the decks of the Titanic—singing one last verse together. Invading waking nightmares, two starved and freezing men wearing pink triangles hold

each other against the cold of an unheated human warehouse. At least they had each other, we comfort ourselves. And watching Waco we all wonder if history will repeat itself with another Jonestown conclusion —fascinated that so many might die together. Romeo and Juliet are still the benchmark for romantic love, after all.

Perhaps the guilt of survivors sanctifies these endings. Perhaps those who die together experience nothing extraordinary. But just as we probably do not cognitively fear birth as our mothers go into labor—just as birth is perhaps only frightening as we look back—so death is only to be feared as we look ahead. And who wants to face it alone?

The young who enter combat together understand this sacred bond even as twins understand a bond which mystifies the rest of us. Facing death together before their time they somehow discover the frailty of human contact, the preciousness of a buddy's touch or a friend's word.

Though he wrote eloquently of the emotions which drove him from the safety of his hospital bed during World War II to return to his unit on the front lines, not even William Manchester could find the words to describe this special bond. Comaraderie, *esprit de corps*, unit cohesion — they all ring hollow for anyone who has experienced such a unique connection with fellow human beings.

Two Marines, urging the DOD to

"keep gays out" in the op-ed pages of the *New York Times*, use Manchester's words to argue their prejudice. "Without evil intention or misbehavior, gays would dissolve this intimacy and love.

Inevitable sexual attraction and interest would destroy the intangibles that make fighting units greater than the sum of their members, for the love that Mr. Manchester describes is not, and can never be,

sexual. With openly gay and heterosexual personnel together, sexual tension would fester 24 hours a day in deployed military units and ships. Romantic interests, even if unconsummated would shatter the bonds that add up to unit cohesion."

Yeah. Two Marines who think they understand Manchester. Two Marines who've perhaps experienced that special bond. But sadly, two Marines who don't understand their fellow men. Two Marines who don't know themselves. Two Marines who refuse to see the queer truth.

Facing death together before their time, they somehow discover the frailty of human contact, the preciousness of a buddy's touch.



Images of intimacy from World War II.

Facing page: Enlisted men at ease aboard the USS Lexington, 1943.

Above: A sailor checks out his buddy's tattoo on the USS New Jersey, 1944.

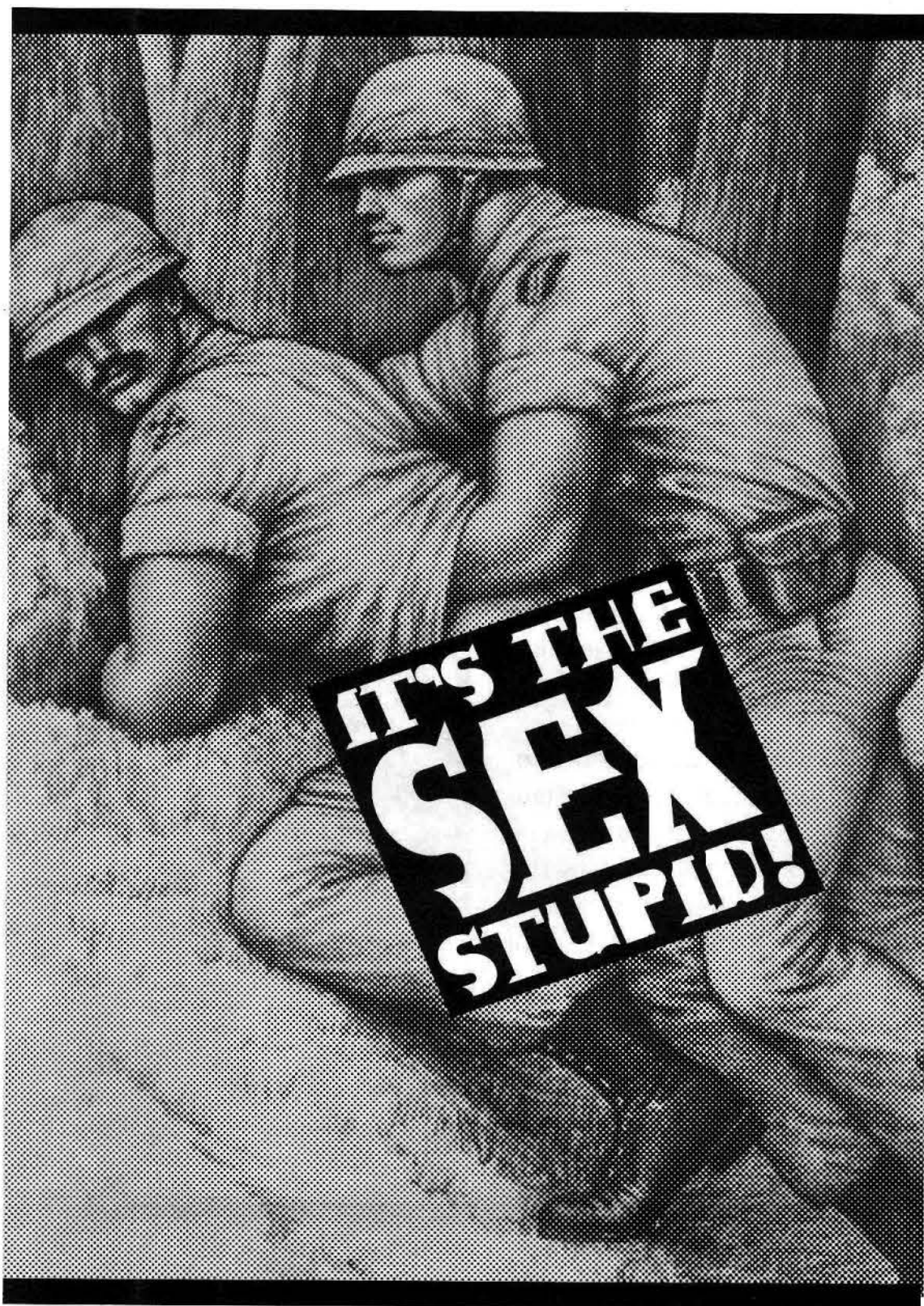
**MEN, I
NOW KNOW,
DO NOT FIGHT
FOR FLAG OR
COUNTRY,
FOR THE
MARINE CORPS
OR GLORY
OR ANY OTHER
ABSTRACTION.**

**THEY FIGHT FOR
ONE ANOTHER.**

**ANY MAN IN
COMBAT
WHO LACKS
COMRADES WHO
WILL DIE
FOR HIM,
OR FOR WHOM
HE IS WILLING
TO DIE, IS NOT
A MAN AT ALL.**

**HE IS
TRULY DAMNED.**

**William Manchester
'Goodbye Darkness'**



Give me a hundred teenage recruits who haven't had a chance to jack off for weeks. Put them in a steamy shower. I'll give you sexual tension.

I love America. But America suffers from a tragic flaw. America suffers from a Puritanism which runs so deep in our history and our psyches that sexual freedom is impossible. Freedom from sex is impossible. We are all so bundled up with sexual taboo, the straight boy hypocrisy that facilitates predatory privilege, that none among us can even take off our boots without the smell of sex filling the room. And military life requires more than that. Much more.

So why can't we just tell the truth? Why can't we just admit that we are sexual beings whose sexuality is far more complicated than a DOD directive? Why can't we admit that among so many hormonally charged young

men and women sexual tension is inevitable?

The two Marines who appropriated William Manchester's words say telling the truth will create that kind of sexual tension. But it already exists. And to discharge it should we not begin by acknowledging the diversity and complexity of human sexuality? Do these two Marines really believe that they have ever taken a public shower unseen by someone who desired them? Do they really believe men and women to be so simple as to desire only what they are trained to want, only what they confess to want only what our Puritan culture permits them to want?

It's time to confront the most human element of our military machine. As we know our ships, our tanks, our guns so we should know ourselves and each other.

The Thebans thought men would fight more fiercely in defense of their lovers, and the army they built conquered the known world. For 90 years the Thebans ruled in absolute hegemony, thanks to the 300 queers of the Sacred Band.

Yes. There was probably sexual tension within the Sacred Band. How could there not be? But it was honest. It was healthy.

We are now faced with a potentially crippling situation in our modern forces, because we refuse to admit the human part of the machine is sexual at all. We foolishly ignore one of the most certain traits of the human ranks. We choose to be naive rather than enlightened.

The military stands at a critical crossroads. Now is the time for the generals to take an honest look at their human machine. Now is the time to admit that adults have sex, even if they are in the Marine Corps. Now is the time to address Tailhook and all the symptoms of a sexually unhealthy force. Now is the time to tell the queer truth.

The two Marines don't understand. They think the presence of queers who tell the truth will bring down the military. They're mistaken. The cause of military disintegration will not be the truth, but the lies. Lies, hypocrisy and the secrets we keep are the prime cause of unhealthy sexual tension.

It is already a problem, already clouding the significance of that sacred bond between men who die together.

The problem soldier is not the soldier who says he's

queer. The problem soldiers are those who cannot accept themselves or each other.

If we want to fix it, we have to talk about it. We have to tell the queer truth.

'Perish miserably those who think that these men did or suffered anything shameful'

— PHILIP OF MACEDON
On viewing the corpses of the Sacred Band on the battlefield at Chaeroneia.



How to be a queer patriot

Ever since I was a schoolboy, and long before I was a lover, I knew I was a queer. I got a lot of feedback. FAG! HOMO! QUEER!

But I survived it. I was young. I was tough. And on the third bell I stood alongside my classmates, solidly placed my hand over my heart, and pledged allegiance to a flag which I really believed flew in the name of liberty and justice for all, even queers like me. I believed that the taunts and jeers and hatred were childhood cruelties, that as an adult I would be free because I lived in the United States of America. In 1987, when the U.S. Navy discharged me for homosexuality, I realized that for twenty-five million Americans, there is no liberty, there is no justice. DoD Directive 1332.14, banning homosexuals from the military, is the written proof.

I stand by a wreath on a rainy Memorial Day, a queer patriot who has come to remember.

I've come to remember that of the legions who have died in defense of the flag, thousands have been queers like me. I've come to remember that my people, too, have fertilized freedom with their blood, sacrificed their lives for that schoolday idea, "Liberty and Justice for all."

I've come to remember that throughout this nation's savage history queers too have pined for their lovers back home, foxhole yearnings over crumpled photos secreted away in ammo belts.

I've come to remember that if the price of liberty is lost American lives, then queers have a vested interest. I've come to remember that we have helped to pay the price. Queer patriots. Queer heroes. Queer Americans. But in remembering them, I cannot forget the queer truth.

I cannot forget that before they could die for their country, those queer patriots first had to lock their queer

hearts and souls in a closet of self-denial and self-hatred. The only fitting tribute to them is our solemn promise that we will never again go silently into those dark corners.

Lest their bodily sacrifice be in vain, we must promise never to sacrifice our queer hearts and souls as they did, on an altar of old ideas and heterosexist lies. Because an America which locks us in the closet is not an America for which we should willingly give our lives. Some things just aren't worthy of defense. The closet is one of them.

The queers who have given their lives are heroes, but their heroism is wasted if we fail to take the next step. Their heroism is meaningless if we cannot denounce the hypocrisy of the closet, and teach a new generation of queers that the ultimate sacrifice for those who marched before them was not lost limbs or spilled blood or dutifully given lives — but their true selves. That sacrifice is neither patriotic nor heroic. We must introduce to a new queer generation a new army of heroes.

Like the drill sergeant who has dedicated herself to the fight against military homophobia. Like the midshipman who was denied his degree because he told the truth. Like the Navy pilot whose admission on network television wrecked his career while the whole world watched.

Queer heroes. Men and women who understand that although they've been denied their right to defend the flag, they cannot be denied their right to defend the ideas for which it stands. Theirs is the noble fight. If they win, this great nation wins with them.

Queer brothers. Queer sisters. As I leave the cemetery I think of you. What will you sacrifice to this new war, this homo-battle to reclaim the honor of Old Glory? Are you prepared to discard the lies of self-oppression which kept us all silent for so long? Are you prepared to condemn the closet in which past queer patriots served? Are you prepared to tell the queer truth?

WE
WILL
NOT
RETREAT



Washington DC
25 April 1993

A CALL TO ARMS

WE DEMAND IMMEDIATE REPEAL of Department of Defense Directive 1332.14 without qualification or stipulation. We have waited long enough. **WE WILL NOT ACCEPT SEGREGATION** of troops or exclusion from any duty, post, or advancement. We will not be their lavender mascots. **WE WILL NOT STAY IN THE CLOSET** in exchange for a blind-eye policy. We are not fighting for our right to privacy. We are fighting for our right to be public. **WE WILL EXPECT FAIRNESS** in military regulations regarding spousal benefits, access to base housing and other tax-supported facilities. Our queer partners are as deserving as Mrs. Colin Powell. **WE WILL SET AN EXAMPLE FOR HETEROSEXUALS** in our compliance with a revised code of sexual conduct based not on archaic moral hypocrisy, but on military pragmatism. We will not imitate the Tailhook tactics of hetero perverts. **WE WILL REQUIRE TOLERANCE** from our hetero comrades-in-arms just as we have been required to tolerate them all our lives. Boot-camp should prepare recruits for battle, not fag-bashing. **WE WILL CONTINUE TO COMMIT SODOMY** with our queer lovers in direct violation of Article 125 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice. Love is not a crime. **REPEAL SODOMY LAWS NOW!**

The logo consists of the letters 'QLF' in a bold, white, sans-serif font, centered within a solid red rectangular background.